

# TEEN ALCOHOL USE

PRIDE-Omaha, Inc. is frequently asked for clarification regarding youth use of alcohol. We recognize that there is no way alcohol can be used wisely or responsibly in the social environment of those under the legal drinking age of 21.

## *The facts:*

1. All states designate 21 as the legal drinking age; teenage drinking is in violation of the law (exclusive of traditional religious ritual). There is no known safe level of alcohol use by those under the age of 21.
2. Adolescent bodies and minds are still developing until their mid '20's; the health consequences are clearly negative.
3. An adolescent can become alcoholic in six months to two years; this time frame is much more rapid than in adults.
4. Alcohol is a sedative drug; coordination, judgment, and reflexes are impaired. With judgment impaired from drinking, a teenager is not likely to make wise decisions.
5. Parents have the right and responsibility to set limits; our young people need parental support to say NO.
6. Alcohol use by adolescents causes many problems in the lives of youth and their families. Alcohol use is related to at least one-half of all crime, violence, rapes, sexual activity, poor school performance, assaults, crashes, and other problems among underage populations in America. Accidental overdose and suicide are also often results of alcohol use.

Responding to the fact that the most common cause of death among the teenage population is drunk driving, well-intentioned groups have organized to oppose driving while drunk, concentrating their efforts on reducing automobile crashes that involve teens and alcohol. While the importance of saving lives cannot be underestimated, the real issue is the enabling of teenage drinking.

Millions of teenagers are drinking in violation of the law. We do not tolerate moderate amounts of vandalism or theft. How then can we tolerate moderate consumption by our youth of an unhealthy and illegal chemical? We cannot. Our real concern should be the healthy development and maturation of young people into responsible and contributing adulthood. We must affirm a goal of drug-free youth.